NCA
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JOHN BUE/PARIS

# FRENCH STUDENT UNREST

ANNCR:

THE CURRENT UNREST AMONG STUDENTS IN FRANCE HAS DEEP ROOTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND IN GRADUATE UNEMPLOYMENT. VOA'S JOHN BUE SENDS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE UPHEAVAL OF ALMOST EXACTLY EIGHT YEARS AGO IN MAY, 1968, HAD SIMILAR ROOTS. AT THAT TIME STUDENT RIOTING WAS FOLLOWED BY A NATIONWIDE LABOR STRIKE, BUT IT DID NOT FUNDAMENTALLY ALTER FRENCH UNIVERSITY STRUCTURES. GENERAL DE GAULLE MOBILIZED A VETERAN POLITICIAN, FORMER PREMIER EDGAR FAURE, TO MEND THE BROKEN CROCKERY. HIS REFORM GAVE THE STUDENTS A SEAT ON UNIVERSITY GOVERNING BOARDS, BUT THE MORE RADICAL AMONG THEM REFUSED TO PARTICIPATE IN ELECTIONS. HE GAVE INDIVIDUAL UNIVERSITIES MORE STRUCTURAL AUTONOMY BUT THEY ARE STILL LARGELY SUBJECT TO CENTRAL GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVES.

CURRICILA WERE ONLY SUPERFICIALLY ALTERED. PERHAPS THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT INNOVATION WAS THE CREATION OF AN "EXPERIMENTAL" UNIVERSITY AT VINCENNES NEAR PARIS WERE WORKER-STUDENTS ARE ADMITTED WITHOUT HIGH-SCHOOL DIPLOMAS.

BUT WITHIN THE STANDARD UNIVERSITIES, CURRICULA CONTINUE TO BE ANGLED HEAVILY TOWARD THE LIBERAL ARTS, WHICH STILL ATTRACT MANY MORE STUDENTS THAN DO SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL DISCIPLINES. OUTLETS ARE THEREFORE MAINLY IN THE ACADEMIC FIELD, AND THERE ARE JUST NOT ENOUGH TEACHING JOBS TO PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT FOR GRADUATES.

FOUR YEARS AGO, THAT IS TO SAY NEARLY FIVE YEARS AFTER THE MAY UPRISINGS, THE GOVERNMENT STARTED SEEKING LEGISLATION TO GEAR THE SYSTEM MORE CLOSELY TO THE NEEDS OF A RAPIDLY INDUSTRIALIZING ECONOMY. EDGAR FAURE'S REFORM HAD PROVIDED THE FRAMEWORK BUT NOT THE MECHANISM. WORK ON THE SECOND REFORM REACHED FRUITION SHORTLY AFTER PRESIDENT GISCARD D'ESTAING CAME TO POWER.

THE FRENCH COMMUNIST PARTY THEN SPOKE OUT, CHARGING THAT THE REFORM WOULD PLACE UNIVERSITY STUDIES IN THE HANDS OF BUSINESS AND INDUSTRIAL INTERESTS. IT WAS FOLLOWED BY THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COALITION OF THE LEFT, THE SOCIALIST AND RADICAL-SOCIALISTS.

THE COMMUNIST-BACKED NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS BEGAN PROTESTS ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO, THEN WERE JOINED BY AN ESTIMATED ONE HUNDRED THOUSAND STUDENTS, HIGH SCHOOL PUPILS AND TEACHERS WHO DEMONSTRATED LAST WEEK IN ABOUT THIRTY FRENCH CITIES.

A MAJORITY OF UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS THEN JOINED THE FRAY BY VOTING TO SHELVE THE REFORM. MANY OF THEM FEEL IT IS TOO RADICAL A DEPARTURE FROM THE FRENCH LITERARY AND CLASSICAL TRADITION. AS THINGS STAND NOW, THE STUDENTS HAVE VOTED TO CONTINUE THEIR MOVEMENT WITH ANOTHER DAY OF PROTEST NEXT FRIDAY. BOTH SIDES IN THE DISPUTE ARE CONCERNED WITH FACE-SAVING. THE GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WANT TO SCUTTLE A CAREFULLY PREPARED PLAN WHICH IT FEELS IS ESSENTIAL TO IMPROVE FRANCE'S ECONOMIC FUTURE. PROTESTING STUDENTS ARE EXHILARATED BY THE SUCCESS OF THEIR MOVEMENT. THE POWERFUL OPPOSITION OF THE LEFT CLEARLY FEELS IT HAS A MAJOR ISSUE ON WHICH TO PLAGUE THE GOVERNMENT.

AND OF TWO PROVINCIAL CITIES LAST WEEK, WHEN EXTREMISTS FOREIGN TO THE ORGANIZED PROTEST MOVEMENT CLASHED WITH THE POLICE. IF THIS TREND WERE TO DEVELOP, THE SITUATION COULD DETERIORATE. BUT THE LEFTWING PARTIES AND UNIONS ARE NOW LOOKING TOWARD PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS TWO YEARS HENCE. THEY ARE NOT THOUGHT LIKELY TO WELCOME THE RE-ENACTMENT OF THE NINETEEN SIXTY-EIGHT UPHEAVAL WHICH PRODUCED AN UNPRECEDENTED ELECTORAL BACKLASH AGAINST THEM.

GH/RCS